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Dr. Henry A. Kissinger

Following our telephone conversation Friday morning, I asked George Carver to give me a piece of paper on the facts about the Route 9 operation as best he was able to put them together from the Pentagon briefing and from our own records. I send this paper to you for whatever use it may have.

(S) [Redacted]

Richard Helms

Attachment - 1

[Redacted] - Enemy Capabilities to Interfere with Phase I of Operation ASHAU/LAMSON 719.

30 January 1971

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Copy #1 - Kissinger
Copy #2 - Asst Dir
Copy #3 - Mac Pherson

29 January 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Enemy Capabilities to Interfere with Phase I
of Operation ASHAU/LAM SON 719

1. As we understand it, the concept of operations for Operation ASHAU/LAM SON 719 includes a development stage -- Phase I -- which involves the positioning of troops earmarked for use in subsequent phases. Part of the Phase I plan requires the reopening of Route 9 from its present motorable terminus at Khe Sanh to the Lao border and the development of Khe Sanh as a forward base for the contemplated deployment of ARVN assault forces westward toward Tchepone. The preparatory phase itself is vulnerable to harassment by enemy troops which are currently located in or near the south trace of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Vigorous enemy activity against the US forces designated to secure and repair Route 9 could upset the present timetable for ASHAU/LAM SON 719.

2. As we understand it, the old camp at Khe Sanh which figured in the 1967/1968 siege is not now occupied by either friendly or enemy forces. There is an automatic radio relay station on Hill 950, north of the old base camp, which requires only two men to service the unit. Available evidence suggests that there are currently some 3,000 plus enemy troops in the general Khe Sanh area. Two North Vietnamese Army (NVA) regiments, the 246th and 27B, with a combined strength of about 2,600 men, are located respectively, about 15 miles north and 20 miles northeast of Khe Sanh. The last ARDF fix on the 27B Regiment was in August 1970, hence the possibility exists that it may no longer be in a position to threaten Route 9 or Khe Sanh. The 246th Regiment was last fixed in mid-December 1970. On 27 January, three unidentified elements of the 84th NVA Artillery Regiment were fixed by ARDF in the Khe Sanh area. [redacted] suggested that the 84th Regiment was last located in the vicinity of Dong Hoi, engaged in training and logistics activity, thus at least part of the 84th would appear to be moving into the Ashau operational area.

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One other element, the B-5 Front, a command and control entity, is located in a position to perform a senior command and control function for tactical entities in this general area. (See Map 1). In short, the enemy does have available in reasonable proximity to the Route 9/Khe Sanh area a pool of forces he could draw on to harass Phase I of the Ashau operation and inflict casualties on the allied troops charged with executing Phase I.

3. Route 9, the principal road which will be utilized by friendly forces striking toward Tchepone, is generally in motorable condition with the exception of a stretch on both sides of the Lao border. The segment from Dong Ha to Khe Sanh Village (35 miles) is probably in the best condition with about two-thirds of it, from Dong Ha to the Route 556 junction, receiving regular military maintenance. The stretch from the 9/556 junction to Khe Sanh Village, some 13 miles, receives occasional military maintenance. From Khe Sanh to the junction with Route 92 in Laos, roadability is marginal, requiring engineering troops to repair. Route 9 from the 9/92 junction is in fair condition, but will probably need some attention if used by heavy traffic. In general, however, Route 9 will probably be easy to maintain assuming good protection from enemy harassment and where repairs are required will be well within the means of engineering troops. (See Map 2)

4. The enemy has not used Route 9 for much traffic either this year or last year. The areas east and west of the Laos/South Vietnam border, as noted above, are in disrepair but could be quickly made motorable. There are border-crossing trails in the Route 9 area and we presume some supplies are portered along these trails. Sensor detections on the exit routes from Laos into SVN have been very light thus far this dry season. The only significant detections have been on Route 922 -- where for the past few weeks detections have been running some 30 trucks per day.

George, A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachments



